

JACK'S SWEETHEART.

"Aunt, you must listen to me!" The proud head is thrown back and the blue eyes are flashing like sapphires in the sun. "I will not marry Mr. Chester—I despise him! You know well that if he had no money you would never admit him to your house! Oh, aunt, I never even dreamed you were so mercenary!"

"I am not—for myself. It is for you, child—it is of your future that I am thinking. I must die some time, and you know the conditions of my husband's will make it impossible for me to leave you one penny. Could you bear poverty after enjoying all the pleasures which wealth can give? Ah, child, it is a hard, bitter opponent to battle with when one is so young and lovely as you are!"

"I have a profession, aunt. I shall not starve. And even if I had no way of earning my bread I would not marry a man whom I detest for his money."

"Perhaps you and Jack Dunraven have resolved to try poverty together," suggests Mrs. Thornton.

There is the faintest suspicion of a sneer on the handsome mouth, but she is too well bred to allow it to become anything more than a suggestion.

"Poverty with the man I love would be happiness compared with a blighted life. Aunt, do you believe in mercenary marriages?"

"Why not? I married the man my parents chose for me; a man they knew could give me everything my heart desired, and as whose wife I would be a queen in society."

"Were you happy?"

The handsome brows contracted a little.

"Yes, child—what an absurd question."

"Ah, aunt, I don't believe it! You were not as happy as you could have been. Do you really think that I would be happy as Mr. Chester's wife? Let your heart speak."

But the inscrutable mask is on her face again; that instant's agony is over. She had cast off the young lover who had her love for the wealthy suitor. Well, the world is no wiser.

"Why should you not?" she says. "You would be mad to reject him, Beth. He can give you every luxury—more even than I can. He is old, true, but that is nothing. He would exchange his wealth for your youth and beauty. You could do no better. Even I, with all my ambition, would be satisfied with such a marriage. You have done brilliantly—exceeded my hopes. But you must forget Jack; he is poor, he could never make you happy."

"Is wealth, luxury, pleasure all one must live for? Is love to have no place in one's life at all?" cries Beth.

Mrs. Thornton shrugs her beautiful shoulders.

"When one is young one's heart is apt to take the lead in one's life," she says. "You are young, what is to be expected? Mr. Chester will be here this evening—see that he receives the answer he should."

With this she sweeps gracefully away, throwing a significant smile at her niece as she closes the door.

"Ah, Jack," said Beth Russell, softly, "I will be true to you till death—through poverty, through everything! You doubt my love now, but some day I will prove to you how even a society girl can love."

It has been bitterly cold all day, and for the first time perhaps in many weeks the street corners are deserted. A warm house and a warmer fire is every stray pedestrian's goal. And now, just at dusk, as the lights are just peeping through the gathering gloom, a fine, cutting snow begins to fall.

The usual crowd at the little station is dispersing; the bustle and excitement caused by the arrival of the through passenger train has subsided and the operator is left once more to himself.

She closes her key with a little snap, goes up to the blazing fire in the huge, ugly stove and holds out her slender hands to its warm radiance.

"The petted darling of a wealthy home and innumerable friends in a common serge gown!" She laughs softly and rubs one hand up and down the sleeve of her dress. "I wonder what Mr. Chester would say were he to see me now! Ah, poor aunt, I wish you could have lived! But perhaps it is best as it is, and I am glad—glad you could not leave me one dollar. Poor, proud Jack! When he hears that I—L, the supposed heiress—am poor, even poorer than he is, will he come to me—then?"

The door opens and slams, letting in a cold gust of rain, wind and snow.

"Ah, Lenn, is that you?" she says brightly, as a young giant of a fellow comes toward her, shaking the snow from his clothes like a great dog. "How could you remember me on a night like this? And no overcoat!" she exclaims. "Why, you will freeze!"

His handsome face lights up with a smile that displays a dazzling row of teeth.

"Perhaps I stopped in to get warm," he said roguishly, "and not to see you at all. Why, it was only yesterday that I saw you!"

Then the brightness dies out of his face, and some of the youthfulness goes with it.

"Ah, what an eternity that has seemed to me," he says, his eyes dark with earnestness. "Every minute spent away from you is a blank. I never knew what it was to count the minutes before you came. I never had this restlessness before, but with you I am calm; you quiet me; just one glance from your eyes—that is enough."

She lays one soft little hand on his powerful brown one.

"Poor Lenn!" she says softly. "I am sorry."

He turns away and draws one hand across his eyes, then smiles at her in almost his usual light-hearted fashion.

"By the way," he says, "I am afraid the bridge across the river just below here will not hold 902 tonight if it is as loaded as usual. Well, I'm off; I may be back this way in an hour to help you keep away the cold."

He buttons his coat about his throat

and draws his fur cap over his eyes. At the door he looks back and hesitates.

"I feel strangely reluctant to leave you here all alone," he says wistfully.

"Why, what could harm me?"

"Nothing in all Trenton, that I know of—but would you, like me to stay with you?"

"How good you are!" she says. "But do you think I would allow you to go without your supper in order that you may protect me from unseen peril?" She laughs merrily. "No, Lenn, I am as safe as it—as if—well, nothing can happen to me, at all events. So go with a clear conscience."

And this time he goes and does not look back.

She shivers a little as she remembers what he has said about the bridge. What a sudden chill of terror his words had struck to her heart.

"The bridge will not hold 902!" she says to herself. "It is a through passenger and will not stop unless I signal it. I must find out. It is not due for half an hour yet. I shall have time."

She throws a long, dark cloak over her shoulders and takes down a red light from the wall. With another glance at the clock she rushes out in the stormy black night. Down the track she speeds, the lantern dancing through the darkness like a will-o'-the-wisp. The bridge is about a quarter of a mile from the station, but she knows every step of the way. Suddenly a deep, roaring sound meets her ears.

"The river! The river!" she gasps. "Lenn said today it had risen fearfully. That frail bridge will be swept away as if it were a stick in such a fierce torrent."

Now she is at the bridge—but where is the bridge? The last of it is swept away in the black, seething waters as she reaches the bank, and at that moment, another sound, heard faintly above the roar of the river, sends a new terror to her heart. A distant thundering sound, and she knows the train is coming through the cut half a mile away.

"Oh, God, for some strength!" she groans. "All those souls must not be lost!"

She struggles on through the fearful wind that drives the thin, cutting snow in her face like so many tiny lashes. On comes the express—nearer, nearer. Gradually the roar of the river changes into the roar of the oncoming train. Once she stumbles and falls, and her fingers, stiff with cold, almost lose their grasp on the precious red signal; but she is up almost before she touches the ground.

"Only a few more rods," she breathes, "and they are saved!"

Now she can see the lights from the station, and almost simultaneously there flashes around a curve in the inky darkness the headlight of 902 coming down the track at full speed.

With a last desperate effort she gains the station, and, standing in the center of the track, waves the red light frantically above her head. She tries to cry out—her voice is drowned in the roar of the wind and the approaching train. But the engineer's head is out of the cab window; he sees the slender, wind-blown figure on the track, her tragic white face gleaming in the dazzling glare of the headlight. He throws back his lever, and gradually—gradually—the long train comes to a standstill, the engine panting and quivering like a live thing and sending out great volumes of dense smoke.

They are saved! The lantern falls from her numb hand, and she sinks down on the track, shivering and trembling all over. There is a crowd about her in an instant asking questions that she is too exhausted to reply to, but among all the strange faces she sees one familiar one that sends the blood to her white face and the light to her eyes. She holds out her hand with a little faint cry, and it is clasped in both of Jack's warm ones and held close to his heart.

Then she turns to the conductor, who is standing impatiently beside her.

"The bridge is gone," she says. The words come with difficulty through her white, cold lips. "I went down to see and reached here barely in time to save the train."

When they all know what has occurred what a cheer is raised for her! Jack leads her into the station and brings the best chair he can find in the office and seats her before the glowing fire—her own Jack! And she has saved his life! A great throb of exultation goes through her as she sees him standing there, so strong and tall and handsome. Ah, now he knows how a society girl can love!

She is almost dead with cold, but she smiles faintly at him and then the white lids close, but not before she knows Lenn is beside her and has her hand in his and is bending over her, his young face white and anxious, and so, between the two men who love her, she gains consciousness after a little and receives the heartfelt thanks of all the passengers.

Jack and Lenn have shaken hands cordially and Lenn, with a horrible ache in his heart, has gone away and left them together. He knows that it is the man that Beth loves, but he bears it bravely. Beth is happy and he tries to be glad for her sake.

Jack has her hands in his and is looking into the sweet, shy eyes.

"You have saved my life, Beth," he says, and the gay voice is very grave now. "Are you going to make me wish that you had not? I had heard of your aunt's death, and my heart ached for you, but I dared not come near you. I waited to hear of your marriage to Mr. Chester, but I did not. Ah! Beth, brave little girl, to face poverty when you could have commanded millions by a single little word."

"It was for you, Jack," she says in a low voice. "I loved you—could I swear to love another? Aunt tried very hard to persuade me to accept Mr. Chester. Poor aunt!" she sighs, and the shadowed eyes brighten with a smile. "I have you, Jack," she says. "You will never leave me again," softly, "will you?"

"No, sweetheart," he says, "never again."—Sweetheart Magazine.



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An abstract of the Annual Report made January 1, 1892, to the Board of Control of the State of New Jersey, and filed in the Department of the Secretary of State in pursuance of law.

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Bonds and mortgages \$158,400 00 Real Estate 3,000 00 U. S. and other bonds 31,984 00 Interest due and accrued 4,040 05 Office furniture, etc. 500 00 Cash in bank and office 19,975 87

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